



NEWS RELEASE

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service
Salmon - Challis
National Forest
50 Hwy 93 South
Salmon, Idaho 83467

Contact: Gail Baer (208) 756-5177

Withington Burned Area Recovering

Salmon, ID, November 2004 -- The Withington burned area has been closed to motorized vehicles since the fall of 2003. The closure followed the 10,500 acre wildfire that burned in the upper reaches of the Withington and Mulkey Creek drainages southeast of Salmon, ID last summer. The Salmon/Cobalt Ranger District advised closing the area to motorized vehicles to provide for public safety; to reduce the potential for erosion; and to reduce the potential for the spread of invasive weeds. The objective was to give the area time to heal with no disturbance, and it is working.

The District will remove the gate in mid-December to open the area to motorized travel under the Forest travel plan. "I really appreciate the cooperation from the public and range permittees during this special closure period. Their cooperation assisted in the restoration of the area." stated Bill Schuckert, Salmon/Cobalt Acting District Ranger.

One resource response forest service specialists look for when deciding if an area is recovered is good ground cover of desirable species. "The grasslands within the burned area have sufficient regrowth of grass to support opening the gate for next season." noted Bruce Roberts, SCRD Fisheries Biologist, on a recent field trip to the area. The success of the perennial grass recovery is due to the beneficial rains this summer, public support of the closure, and the cooperation of the range permittee in resting this allotment from cattle grazing for two growing seasons as required by the forest plan following a wildfire.

We are seeing positive responses in the understory of forested areas that burned as well, aspen clones and shrubs are resprouting, lodgepole pine seedlings have been spotted, mixed forbs, commonly called wildflowers, are pioneering in both the grassland and forest areas.



Grass and forb understory recovery



Aspen sprouts

Emergency and long term rehabilitation projects were the main focus of administrative work within the closure last fall and this past summer. The projects include mulching above the Sunset Heights water system, contour felling of trees as erosion barriers, cleaning culverts and ditches, noxious weed monitoring and spraying, hiring a range rider to prevent cattle grazing on a vulnerable portion of an allotment, and the Harmony Mine CERCLA reclamation project. The Withington Fire Salvage Timber Sale was also marked and sold.



lodgepole pine seedlings



fence reconstruction

Some range improvements were destroyed by the fire and cannot be repaired with emergency funds so the Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) stepped in with funding and the Youth Employment Program provided much of the labor. Over 5.5 miles of fence is being rebuilt and over two miles of pipelines that deliver water to a system of troughs will be replaced next spring.

Although the travel plan allows overland travel in this area, the forest service would prefer the public limit off-road travel as much as possible so the area can continue to heal. All new tracks on a landscape have the potential to create and promote erosion. There are plenty of developed roads within the burned area to meet the needs of forest users.

Firewood cutting will be allowed within the burned area, but will be managed so it does not conflict with the commercial Withington Salvage Sale and the forest recovery process. Please remember that your firewood permit does not allow firewood cutting within 300 feet of a stream, lake, pond or boggy area in order to protect water quality.

As you enjoy your National Forest please be aware that safety hazards still exist in the burned areas. Many burned trees came down over this past year and many more will fall as root systems give way. Stump holes are another hazard. A stump hole is created when a tree's roots burn, leaving a hollow area in the ground that may appear solid on the surface. These holes can be many feet deep and cause serious injury to any person that steps into them.

Recovering burned areas are exciting places to visit. It is an opportunity to see the forest in a pioneer state and witness the remarkable, resilient qualities of nature. Have fun exploring and thank you for abiding by the motor vehicle closure this past year.

####